

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for denying or allowing delivery of an incoming electronic mail (e-mail) message, said incoming message indicating a source e-mail server, a source domain, and an addressee for the message, said system comprising:

a central e-mail server registry database for storing information regarding all e-mail servers and domains authorized to send e-mail messages over the Internet;

means for the addressee to specify characteristics of domains that are authorized to send e-mail messages to the addressee;

means for an e-mail server serving the addressee to access information from the registry database to determine whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics; and

means for allowing delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain possesses the specified characteristics, and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain does not possess the specified characteristics.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the information regarding all authorized e-mail servers and domains includes a status of each e-mail server's registration with the registry database, said status indicating whether each server is registered, whether the server's associated domains are registered, and whether the registrations are in good order.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein the means for allowing delivery and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message includes means for denying delivery if the source domain is not registered, or if the registration of the source domain is not in good order.

4. The system of claim 2, wherein the means for allowing delivery and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message includes means for denying delivery if the source domain is not associated with the source e-mail server.

5. The system of claim 2, wherein the information regarding all authorized e-mail servers and domains also includes a country code indicating a country of origin associated with each registered domain.

6. The system of claim 5, wherein the information regarding all authorized e-mail servers and domains also includes an industry code indicating an industry associated with each registered domain.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the industry code is selected from industry codes defined by the North American Industry Classification System.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein the information regarding all authorized e-mail servers and domains also includes a class code indicating a type of business associated with each registered domain.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the class code is selected from a group consisting of:

- corporate business;
- retail sales business;
- corporate sales business;
- corporate professional services business; and
- consumer professional services business.

10. The system of claim 2, wherein the means for allowing delivery and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message also includes means for denying delivery if the source e-mail server is not registered with the central registry database, or if the source e-mail server's registration is not in good standing.

11. The system of claim 10, further comprising:

a local registry database associated with the e-mail server serving the addressee for downloading predefined information from the central registry database;

means within the e-mail server serving the addressee for accessing the local registry database in a first attempt to determine whether the source e-mail server and/or source domain are registered in good standing, and whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics; and

means within the e-mail server serving the addressee for accessing the central registry database in a second attempt to determine whether the source e-mail server and/or source domain are registered in good standing, and whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics, said second attempt being made in response to determining that the source e-mail server and/or source domain are not registered in the local registry database.

12. A method of denying or allowing delivery of an incoming electronic mail (e-mail) message, said incoming message indicating a source e-mail server, a source domain, and an addressee for the message, said method comprising the steps of:

storing in a central e-mail server registry database, information regarding all e-mail servers and domains authorized to send e-mail messages over the Internet;

specifying for the addressee, characteristics of domains that are authorized to send e-mail messages to the addressee;

receiving the incoming e-mail in an e-mail server serving the addressee;

accessing by the e-mail server serving the addressee, information from the central registry database;

determining whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics;

allowing delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain possesses the specified characteristics; and

denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain does not possess the specified characteristics.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of specifying for the addressee, characteristics of domains that are authorized to send e-mail messages to the addressee includes specifying authorized countries of origin, authorized industries, and authorized classes of businesses from which e-mail messages are to be delivered to the addressee.

14. The method of claim 12, further comprising denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source e-mail server is not registered in the central registry database.

15. The method of claim 12, further comprising denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain is not registered in the central registry database.

16. The method of claim 12, further comprising denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the information in the central registry database indicates that the source e-mail server and/or source domain do not have a registration in good standing.

17. The method of claim 12, further comprising denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain is not associated with the source e-mail server.

18. The method of claim 12, further comprising, before receiving the incoming e-mail, the steps of:

downloading from the central registry database to the e-mail server serving the addressee, predefined information from the registry database; and

storing the downloaded information in a local registry database associated with the e-mail server serving the addressee.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising, after receiving the incoming e-mail, the steps of:

accessing by the e-mail server serving the addressee, the local registry database in a first attempt to determine whether the source e-mail server and/or source domain are registered in good standing, and whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics; and

if the source e-mail server and/or source domain are not registered in the local registry database, accessing by the e-mail server serving the addressee, the central registry database in a second attempt to determine whether the source e-mail server and/or source domain are registered in good standing, and whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising periodically refreshing the downloaded information in the local registry database.

21. The method of claim 18, further comprising refreshing the downloaded information in the local registry database when requested by the e-mail server serving the addressee.

22. An e-mail server registry comprising:
means for registering e-mail servers and domains authorized to send e-mail messages over the Internet;
an e-mail server registry database for storing information regarding the registered e-mail servers and domains; and
means for responding to queries from registered e-mail servers regarding other e-mail servers and/or domains.

23. The e-mail server registry of claim 22, wherein the e-mail server registry database stores information regarding the registration status of each registered e-mail server and domain, and information regarding each registered domain's country, industry, and business class.

24. The e-mail server registry of claim 23, further comprising:
means for receiving a complaint from a registered e-mail server regarding an identified source e-mail server sending an e-mail with characteristics that do not match the registered information regarding the country, industry, or business class of the e-mail's domain; and
means for suspending the identified source e-mail server from the registry upon determining that the source e-mail server is sending e-mails with characteristics that do not match the registered information regarding

the countries, industries, or business classes of the source e-mail server's registered domains.

25. The e-mail server registry of claim 24, further comprising means for changing the registration status of the identified source e-mail server from "good" to "review" after receiving the complaint, and while determining whether the source e-mail server is sending e-mails with characteristics that do not match the registered information regarding the countries, industries, or business classes of the source e-mail server's registered domains.

26. The e-mail server registry of claim 22, wherein the means for responding to queries includes means for determining whether an identified e-mail server and/or domain is registered, whether the identified e-mail server and/or domain is registered in good standing, and whether the identified domain possesses defined characteristics regarding the country, industry, and business class of the identified domain.

27. The e-mail server registry of claim 22, wherein the means for responding to queries includes means for verifying that an identified domain is properly associated with an identified e-mail server.

28. A system for denying or allowing delivery of an incoming electronic mail (e-mail) message, said incoming message indicating a source e-mail server and an addressee for the message, said system comprising:

a central e-mail server registry database for storing registration information for all e-mail servers authorized to send e-mail messages over the Internet;

means for an e-mail server serving the addressee to query the registry database to determine whether the source e-mail server is registered in the registry database; and

means for allowing delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source e-mail server is registered in the registry database, and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source e-mail server is not registered in the registry database.

29. The system of claim 28, wherein the central e-mail server registry database also stores an indication for each e-mail server indicating whether each server's registration is in good standing, and the means for allowing delivery and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message also includes means for denying delivery if the source e-mail server's registration is not in good standing.

30. The system of claim 28, wherein the central e-mail server registry database only responds to queries from registered e-mail servers

31. A system for denying or allowing delivery of an incoming electronic mail (e-mail) message, said incoming message indicating a source e-mail server, a source domain, and an addressee for the message, said system comprising:

an e-mail server serving the addressee;

a local e-mail server registry database associated with the e-mail server serving the addressee, said local registry database storing information for a subset of all e-mail servers and domains authorized to send e-mail messages over the Internet;

means for the addressee to specify characteristics of domains that are authorized to send e-mail messages to the addressee;

means for the e-mail server serving the addressee to access information from the local registry database to determine whether the source domain possesses the specified characteristics; and

means within the e-mail server serving the addressee for allowing delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain possesses the specified characteristics, and denying delivery of the incoming e-mail message if the source domain does not possess the specified characteristics, or if the source domain is not included in the local registry database.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the subset of all e-mail servers and domains includes a subset of domains selected from a group consisting of:

- all domains having a specified country code;
- all domains having a specified industry code; and
- all domains having a specified business class.